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STATE FOR CA/VO, CA/EX

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TAGS: [CVIS](#) [CMGT](#) [KPAO](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: RESUMPTION OF NONIMMIGRANT VISA SERVICES

REF: Mullarkey-Cantrell-Nystrom 12/18/06 e-mail

¶1. Embassy Freetown publicly announced on February 20 that it had resumed nonimmigrant visa processing after a ten-year hiatus. Residents of Sierra Leone no longer must travel to neighboring Guinea to apply for nonimmigrant visas at Embassy Conakry as they have done since Freetown last processed visas in 1997. Embassy Dakar will continue to process immigrant visas for Sierra Leoneans and Embassy Abidjan will continue to process diversity immigrant visas.

¶2. As detailed in Reftel, post's consular section began processing a limited number of nonimmigrant visa cases after moving into its New Embassy Compound (NEC) in December 2006, gradually increasing the number of cases processed over the last two months. Since arriving in May 2006, Conoff has coordinated closely with CA/VO/F/P and CA/EX to prepare to resume NIV services in Freetown, and appreciates CA's outstanding support.

¶3. The current instability in Guinea precludes Sierra Leoneans from traveling to Conakry to apply for nonimmigrant visas, so the resumption of NIV services in Freetown was welcomed even more enthusiastically than anticipated. Ambassador Thomas Hull delivered key remarks during the press conference and emphasized that "the non-immigrant visa process is not a lottery" and encouraged only those that believe they are qualified to apply. The Ambassador also stressed that neither the Ambassador nor any other person in the Embassy can influence the visa process under U.S. law.

¶4. The consular section is employing the Department's new online NIV appointment system and offsite MRV fee collection to manage its workload and increase efficiency. Embassy Dakar is sending a Senior Consular Assistant for two weeks in March to further train staff and provide technical assistance, and post looks forward to the visit of Regional Consular Officer, Charles Wintheiser, on March 19.

¶5. Media reaction to the NIV resumption has been overwhelmingly positive with all major newspapers headlining the announcement, and radio and TV stations giving extensive coverage. Newspaper commentaries have praised this development: "We applaud the United States government for its continuous assistance to the people of Sierra Leone," and "Sierra Leoneans nation-wide jubilated yesterday when they learnt that the United States Embassy has resumed the processing of non-immigrant visas. This will finally end the nightmare of hundreds of Sierra Leoneans who had not only been stranded in Conakry, but duped by unscrupulous hustlers who promised them visas for thousands of dollars. We thank the American Government."

¶6. We would like to thank Embassy Conakry in particular and other neighboring posts for their enduring support over the last ten years processing nonimmigrant visa applications for residents of Sierra Leone.

HULL